DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 369 525 PS 022 258

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TITLE Early Childhood and Pre-School Education in Denmark.
INSTITUTION Ministry of Education and Research, Copenhagen (Denmark).
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 18p.; For 1979 report, see ED 198 957.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Day Care; Early Childhood Education; Educational Trends; Enrollment; Federal Legislation; Foreign Countries; *Government Role; *Kindergarten; *Nursery Schools; Preschool Curriculum; *Preschool Education; *Teacher Education; Teacher Education Curriculum
IDENTIFIERS *Denmark

ABSTRACT

This booklet examines present and future trends in early childhood and preschool education in Denmark. Section one, "Principles and Trends: Joint Responsibility," examines the demographics of Danish families, the government's role in early childhood education and day care, and recent political initiatives. Section two, "The Present Situation with Regard to Legislation and Statistics," describes the types of early childhood educational institutions in Denmark and lists their enrollment. Section three, "Aims and Methods Laid Down and Applied in Preschool Institutions," describes the operation and curriculum of day nurseries, kindergartens, and preschools. Section four, "Children with Special Needs," explains how children with special needs, such as those with mental or physical handicaps or the children of immigrants and refugees, are educated. Section five, "Training of Preschool Teachers," outlines the training program of the nation's 23 kindergarten teacher training colleges. (MDM)

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EDUCATION IN DENMARK

EARLY CHILDHOOD AND PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN DENMARK

(by Agnete Engberg, General Inspector of Education)

Ministry of Education and Research
Frederiksholms Kanal 21
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1989

1. Principles and Trends. Joint Responsibility

During the last decades, much work has been carried out in an effort to define a long-term policy for all essential elements of early childhood education in families, institutions as well as in society as a whole.

It is the general view that matters concerning young children do not only belong to the private sector. There is a close connection between family life, working life, education and social life and questions concerning the development and education of young children.

The background for the change of conception is that children at preschool age live under quite different conditions than they used to. Family patterns have changed dramatically during the past few generations.

Married women represent about 45 p.c. of the total labour force, and 90 p.c. of mothers of young children are working outside the home, half of them in full-time employment. The birth rate has decreased from 72,000 (1975) to 59,000 (1988). An increasing number of women become mothers but at an older age than before. The number of children per woman is low. More than 50 p.c. of families with children (0-15 years) have only one child (1985).

About 80 p.c. of children live in a two-parent family, married or not married. 10 p.c. live with step-families and 10 p.c. with a single parent, usually a single mother.

The classical nuclear family is thus the dominating pattern. But a rather large number of children are born by unmarried mothers: 43 p.c. (1985). A large part of the parents marry later on. Divorces are not unusual.

Young children nowadays thus live in small families. It is normal to grow up in a family with few or no brothers and sisters and to live some or all of the time with only one parent. Housing patterns and urbanization result in curtailed social and cultural primary contact, and traffic hasards furthermore reduce the young child's opportunities of exploring its surroundings and obtaining experience of nature and adults' working life and common culture, norms and values.

There has been a general public debate on children's conditions of life and the objectives of early childhood education in family and school, and several grassroot initiatives have been taken to ensure better development possibilities for children.

Trade unions are discussing the needs of better conditions for parents in the event of childbirths and young children's periodical illness.

These circumstances together with the limited resources available compel the responsible authorities to consider the possibilities open to society for restricting the harmful effects of the technological development on children and for taking preventive action. By doing so, society can both make allowance for the individual rights of the child and at the same time create conditions conducive to a better exploitation of the resources available.

From the middle of the 1970s, several political initiatives have been taken to clear up problems and identify ways of solving them.

In the period 1976-81, the Government's Child Welfare Commission examined and made proposals concerning

a. Family policy measures
b. Housing and environmental conditions
c. Day care institutions
d. Early efforts to ensure a healthy mental, physical and social development.

The Commission has formulated a number of objectives of a child policy:
- to respect the child as an individual in the family and in society,
- to give the child a central position in the life of grown-ups,
- to promote - in a wider sense - the physical conditions in which children grow up,
- to even out differences in the conditions of life of children - both in a material and in a cultural sense.

Some basic principles of child policy reflect the Commission's impression of the factors which should be taken into consideration when formulating a future child policy resting on
- equality between the sexes, as it is being considered disadvantageous to pass on the traditional sex role pattern to the coming genera-

tions,
- social equality, not least with regard to the policy of distribution, right and freedom of choice so that attention is paid to discrepancies in the desires, attitudes and resources of families,
- flexibility in order to meet changing demands of the individual family, and
- neutrality as regards the form of cohabitation of parents.

(An English-language summary of the Commission's Report No. 918/81 can be obtained from the Ministry of Social Affairs).

Several studies and considerations concerning **problems related to starting school** have been made by committees; the latest such committee submitted its proposals and recommendations to the Minister of Education in 1981.

In 1975, the Minister of Cultural Affairs appointed a permanent committee on **children's culture**. This committee has examined a wide range of matters of cultural importance to children and has made proposals regarding children's literature, libraries, theatres, films, etc.

In 1986, the Minister of Social Affairs appointed a committee on **young children's daily life**. The committee particularly examined matters concerning health conditions and cooperation between parents and institutions.

In 1987, the Government appointed a permanent committee of civil servants from 13 ministries responsible for following and discussing all matters of children's conditions of life. The committee is supervised by a committee of the 13 ministers. The objective is to coordinate all national activities, including legislation, and to take measures to protect the interests of children and families. An increasing interest in **research and innovation** - social, cultural and educational - can be seen in the field of early childhood education.

2. The present situation with regard to legislation and statistics

In Denmark, education is compulsory for all children between 7 and 16 years of age. Precocious children in particular are allowed to start in the first form a year earlier, if the parents so wish. Quite a number of children below compulsory school age attend different types of pre-

school activities. The local (municipal) authorities are responsible for the provision of school and pre-school activities.

Day nurseries, nursery schools/kindergartens are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the Social Security Act lays down the rules for setting up such institutions.

The institutions are either municipal, independent or private. Subsidies are granted by the State and the municipal authorities, but parents pay part of the expenses (max. 35 p.c. according to their income). Parents with low income do not pay.

Pre-school classes are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research, and the stipulations regarding the setting up of such classes are laid down in the Act on the Folkeskole (Danish primary and lower secondary school). Municipal authorities are required to set up pre-school classes for all children whose parents want them enrolled. Premises for these classes are made available in municipal and private schools. The parents do not pay fees in municipal schools.

Care of children aged 0-6 years by type of care 1985/86 (in percent):

	0-2 years	3-6 years
day nursery	14	1
kindergarten	6	48
youth recreation centre	0	6
municipal day care	24	8
private day care	13	8
grandparents/relatives	14	10
domestic help	6	5
parents only	29	21

Children enrolled in day-care institutions, etc. by age (in percent) 1973-1987

	1973	1976	1979	1982	1985	1987
0-year-olds	11	14	20	25	24	22
1-year-olds	16	22	32	43	49	55
2-year-olds	21	28	36	49	55	61
3-year-olds	34	39	47	61	65	70
4-year-olds	38	44	54	64	69	74
5-year-olds	34	42	51	61	67	72
6-year-olds	20	24	30	36	41	45
7-year-olds	10	12	17	25	30	34
8-year-olds	8	10	14	20	25	28
9-year-olds	6	7	9	13	17	19
10-year-olds	4	4	5	7	8	9

Source: Danish Bureau of Statistics: Social Security and Judicial System. Statistical news 1988:1

Children in day care institutions, etc. Percentage distribution by type of institution 1987

	0-2 year-olds	3-6 year-olds	7-10 year-olds	11-14 year-olds	Total
			Percent		
Nurseries	29	1	-	-	8
Kindergartens	5	62	3	-	34
Youth recreation centres	-	5	68	83	17
Age-integrated inst.	6	18	23	15	16
Approved private day-care	60	14	6	2	25
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Danish Bureau of Statistics: Social Security and Judicial System. Statistical news 1988:1

95 p.c. of 5-6-year-olds attend pre-school classes (1986).

There is still an uncovered demand for pre-schools and nurseries. About 30,000 children (1988) are on the "acute" waiting list.

The authorities therefore provide provisional arrangements and take other measures to give families and children education and care facilities: play groups, activity centres in libraries, pre-school preparatory classes, etc.

3. Aims and methods laid down and applied in pre-school institutions

No goal has been set politically with regard to the tasks to be carried out by day care institutions in relation to the development of young children. But it is generally expected that the aim of these institutions is to supplement the children's homes by offering young children care and participation in educational activities in development-oriented surroundings organized according to age and the individual needs of the children.

Day nurseries are open all day and normally fitted out with facilities for 30-40 children. Before, the institutions were normally divided up into groups according to the age of the children, but for some years there has been a tendency towards dividing the children into family groups, i.e. into small groups consisting of 8-12 children of different age, in which the children are being taken care of by one or two teachers and 1 or 2 assistants.

The work in day nurseries is primarily organized in order to comply with the needs of the children. It goes without saying that their physical needs and care are important concerns of the institutions, but it is also endeavoured to establish a close emotional and social contact to the other children.

New pedagogical and psychological knowledge of children's development has brought about that an increasing emphasis is being laid on the establishment of a stimulating environment, in which the child is subjected to many different experiences and is being trained to be independent, but the child is at the same time given possibilities of attaching itself emotionally to the person in whose care it is (mother's substitute). Cooperation between children, parents and staff is being developed and so is pedagogical supervision of the institutions. Cer-

tain minimum requirements with regard to the standard of buildings, sanitary installations and equipment must be fulfilled in order for the institutions to be recognized.

Historically, nursery schools/kindergartens can be subdivided into two main types: all day institutions and part-time institutions. All-day institutions have developed from the asylums which were established at the beginning of the 19th century as social philantropic institutions mainly catering for the children of working-class families where mothers who were working outside the home could have their children nursed and taken care of instead of having to leave them to themselves.

Part-time institutions came later on (the first one in 1871) and were from the very beginning catering for the children of others strata of the population, mainly socially and economically privileged families who had realized the educational benefit for the children in being together with other children of their own age under the care of specially trained teachers.

As time went on, this distinction between the two types of institutions has gradually disappeared, and today it has no relevance to distinguish between social and pedagogical institutions. At all-day institutions, a number of children will normally spend only part of the day at the institution, and others are there the whole day on account of the benefit to themselves and their own development, and not on account of an actual social need in the traditional sense of the word. This development is in line with the social and political point of view that all citizens should have equal access to public facilities such as schools, libraries, hospitals, recreation centres, open-air grounds, etc. - a view adopting the principle that the authorities should make such services available to all. This was introduced in Act on Child and Youth Care (1964).

The nursery schools/kindergartens are in principle alike as far as their educational aims and their methods are concerned, and they are all a natural link in a social system with different tasks to be carried out, practical, medical, educational, social and cultural.

In spite of similarities, the institutions vary to a certain extent, according to the actual social, geographical and cultural context and the individual teacher. Teachers are free to choose curriculum, working

methods, text books, materials, etc.

This is a challenge and a burden of responsibility for the individual teacher and institution.

Since the 1970s there have been waves of changing theories and ideas. Teachers have eagerly discussed structure, aims and methods and been influenced by many parts of the western and eastern educational spectrum.

Now on the doorstep to the 1990s, the classical Danish pre-school principles can be observed with their roots in the thoughts of Fröbel and Montessori adapted to Scandinavian culture.

The majority of the nursery schools/kindergartens have now dropped grouping of children according to age and are instead dividing them up into family groups in which small children are together with older ones as children belonging to the same family. This grouping naturally puts the teacher in a different position with more varied demands on him/her as a teacher with responsibility for 20 children of different age and development. Some hours a day, special activities are therefore organized in small groups with children of same age/development stage. To a group of 20 children is normally attached 1-2 teachers and 1 assistant.

The main objective of the education of the child in the nursery school-/kindergarten is the physical and psychological needs of the child based on the psychology of the development of the child during its period of early childhood. The teacher organizes the daily routine of the institution, its work, play and other activities with a view to offering each child optimal development of body and mind in environments which stimulate the verbal and social development of the child and the development of independence and personality.

The daily work of the nursery school/kindergarten is characterized by a certain fixed daily routine and rhythm with liberal opportunities for variations. The day of the child is organized so as to leave ample time for play in-doors or out-doors according to preference and weather conditions. Much emphasis is laid on offering opportunities for varied and developing activities with a great variety of materials such as paint, clay, wood, textiles, paper and all kinds of things of the children's own making.

Through singing and playing with primitive musical instruments, gymnastics for small children and drama exercises, it is endeavoured to offer possibilities for experimenting, gaining experience and expressing themselves.

Through the reading of stories and conversations with the children, their imagination and linguistic development is stimulated and they are being imparted an idea of the world outside their homes and the institutions.

It is endeavoured to train the senses and motor skills of the children and to give them possibilities of expressing themselves in play, singing, dancing and other physical activities. They have free access to all kinds of material, to pictures, books and educational materials which they may experiment with and learn fundamental concepts from on which to build their further development in school.

Special emphasis is laid on teaching children about nature and environment. Most Danish children live in cities and need experience from nature, scientifically and aesthetically.

Health education and basic consumer knowledge are natural parts of the curriculum. In several pre-schools even small children help prepare meals and have duties in the daily routines.

The children who spend all day or several hours a day in the institutions normally have a rest in the middle of the day, and an extra meal with fruit and milk is served in the afternoon.

In pre-school classes, the curriculum is similar to that of the kindergartens, but adapted to the 5-6-year-olds. The teacher usually organizes "topic work", periodical occupation with comprehensive subjects.

Social development is considered important, and through being together with other children they learn cooperation and consideration for others, and due to the fact that pre-school classes are located in the same premises as regular school classes they participate in the common activities of the school and get familiarized with normal school life.

The children attend school 3-4 hours a day, and the number of children in a class must not exceed 28. If there are more than 22 children, the teacher is assisted by another teacher.

Since 1984, it has been possible to organize **coordinated school start**: pre-school classes and the first two form levels of primary school are integrated in different ways some hours a week up till total coordination with common contents, activities and methods.

Coordinated school start presupposes an extended conception of school teaching. There is no sense in distinguishing between learning and playing. Aesthetic-creative activity becomes part of the learning process on a par with intellectual activities.

A central goal of the "Folkeskole" is to facilitate a universal personal development of the individual child. The term: universal is understood in a qualitative sense, including essential sides of human life, social, aesthetic and ethic aspects as well as intellectual and physical aspects.

Cooperation with the children's parents is a central obligation of the school staff, and the parents participate in the management of the institutions through representatives on the board and in the parents' council.

Information and guidance are often given to parents. As Danish parents today have fewer children, they often need support and advice in questions relating to their children's development and guidance, and the pre-school staff do as far as possible advise parents.

4. Children with special needs

In most nursery schools/kindergartens, a certain percentage of the children suffer from **physical or mental handicaps**, and for the benefit of these children as well as for normally developed children it is important that kindergarten teachers observe the children and their behaviour closely in order to find out who are in need of special care or medical or psychological treatment, and refer them to specialists for treatment in or outside the institution.

Great importance is attached to preventing and limiting the effects of

handicaps. It is essential to apply help at as early a stage as possible. The Education Act makes it incumbent on local and regional authorities to provide remedial education facilities as early as possible.

The group of young children with severe physical or mental handicaps is narrowed down to 3-4 p.c. of the young children. It is pointed out that no matter whether these children are living at home or in institutions, their development and welfare will make heavier demands than the development and welfare of other children. But they have the same fundamental needs as other children, and this makes continued efforts of integration and normalization desirable.

Local authorities are bound to provide qualified help on their own or in conjunction with other local authorities. There are several points of contact via which handicapped pre-school children obtain this service. Apart from the advisory activities of the education system, a health visitor is available for discussion on her rounds in the families from birth until the child enters a day nursery, pre-school or primary school. Few handicap problems escape the combined attention of the health visitor, regular medical examinations by the patient's own doctor, and the support of the health and welfare department of the local authority for the severely handicapped and socially deprived child. Parents are encouraged to contact the school system, if necessary to apply directly to the school psychology system. They may take the initiative at any time. Where applicable, the health and welfare department has a duty to report any case of need that may come to its notice. The school psychology system includes educational and clinical psychologists, social workers and specially qualified consultants for children with impaired speech, hearing, vision or walk, general and specific learning handicaps, and sick children. The system also offers specialist doctors and auxiliary staff with other training.

Remedial teachers stimulate or teach the child (speech therapy, lipreading, oral training, mobility, rhythm, musical response, etc.), guide parents and institutional staff (indirect education), lend technical and educational aids, and arrange for the services of a physiotherapist or an occupational therapist. Where the demands of remedial assistance exceed the capabilities of the local authority, responsibility passes to the county authorities, which may either make expert assistance, aids and/or finance available or in special circumstances

collaborate with the local authority in organizing training centres and remedial institutions (remedial kindergartens).

It is a basic aim that remedial assistance should be available locally for all handicapped children for whom parents are able and willing to accept the onus of care. In the case of infants (pre-school children), remedial measures are particularly important in the child's total context. Frequently, a handicapped child can mean a handicapped family. It is thus necessary for the educational, medical and social sectors to keep each other informed and cooperate in arriving at solutions tailored to the particular problems of the child, the family, the school or the institution. During the year preceding admission to school proper, the child can enter pre-school class, where the same remedial assistance is available as is open to the other classes in school.

Migrants' and refugees' children create new duties and challenges to the social and educational systems.

Denmark is a country with one national language and a relatively homogenous culture. Denmark has no ethnic minorities - the populations of Greenland and the Faroes form their own societies. Thus, the Danish society is rather unfamiliar with intercultural co-existence. Since the beginning of the 1970s, the education of migrants has been developed and measures have been taken to extend intercultural education to the pre-school field as well. Gradually, the mothers enter the labour market and ask for care for their young children if there are no female relatives to look after them.

It is aimed that young children should be educated and cared for by persons of their own nationality and language (mother tongue). In preschools with migrants' children, there will therefore normally be assistant staff of the same nationality as the children. Since 1985, teacher training for migrants has been possible in order to support the upbringing of children coming from foreign cultures.

5. Training of pre-school teachers

Educational institutions: Kindergarten teacher training colleges or combined kindergarten and recreation centre teacher training colleges of which there are 23 distributed throughout the country. There are plans of reducing the number of colleges.

Duration of training: 3 years.

Admission requirements: Applicants must be at least 18 years of age.

a) Leaving Examination after the 9th form of the Folkeskole plus the Higher Preparatory Examination (HF-eksamen) in at least two subjects plus at least two years' work experience in trade, industry or institutions for children;
b) Various forms of vocational education of at least 2 1/2 years' duration;
c) Upper Secondary School Leaving Examination (Studentereksamen), the Higher Preparatory Examination (HF-eksamen) or the Higher Commercial Examination (HH)/Higher Technical Examination (HTX);
d) A leaving examination or degree from a foreign country with which Denmark has an agreement of mutual recognition of diplomas or degrees when such qualifications give admission to similar types of education in the home country. (The applicant may be required to sit for a Danish language examination);
e) After the 9th form combined theoretical studies in the 10th form, at folk high schools, etc. plus at least 9 months of experience in trade, industry, institutions, etc. of a total duration of 2 years and 9 months.

Subjects taught:	Number of lessons	Optional lessons
Psychology	193	
Theory of Education	122	
Applied Pedagogy	172	65
Social Studies, Legislation	112	
Social Medicine	73	
Speech, Logopedy	40	

Music, Singing	132	
Physical Education, Sport	112	
Drama	91	65
Creative Art, Handicraft	293	
Danish, Literature	144	
Nature Studies, Biology	102	

Courses: First aid (6 lessons) and study methodology (12 lessons) plus remedial education (90 lessons).

Teaching practice: 27 weeks (first year 14 weeks, second year 13 weeks).

During the third year, the student must make a special study of his/her own choice. Assembly lessons (80), excursions, study visits and study counselling form part of the training.

The student sits for final examinations before receiving their diploma.

About 850 teachers passed the final examinations in 1988, 7 p.c. of which were men. In the 1970s, about 15 p.c. of the graduates were men.

In-service training and refresher courses are available during the professional career and are arranged by colleges, organizations, authorities, etc.

Further training is offered at the Royal Danish School of Educational Studies. Further training may be part-time or full-time and it consists of various subjects, including examinations in order for the candidates to obtain certain qualifications as special education teachers, consultants and innovators.

Research in the pre-school field takes place at the Royal Danish School of Educational Studies. The scientific institute is connected to a centre for combined or separate studies (medical science, social science and human/aesthetic science).

S. 06-05-12/89

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